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DEPT FOR SCA/A AND EUR/AGS (Y.SAINT-ANDRE)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2018
TAGS: EAID KDEM PGOV PREL AF SZ
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: SWISS "CONSOLIDATING" RECONSTRUCTION
ASSISTANCE -- NO INCREASES PLANNED

REF: STATE 32155

Classified By: DCM Leigh G. Carter; reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Charge met April 16 with Ambassador Pierre Combernois, Chief of the MFA's Division for Asian and Pacific Affairs, to discuss Swiss plans for the upcoming International Support Conference on Afghanistan, to be hosted by France in Paris on June 12. Per reftel, Charge emphasized the importance of the conference and the hope that Switzerland will increase its assistance to Afghanistan, particularly in the wake of the Swiss MOD's decision to withdraw Swiss contributions to ISAF. Combernois said that he expects that MFA State Secretary Michael Ambuehl -- FM Calmy-Rey's deputy -- probably will head the Swiss delegation to the conference. According to Combernois, a reluctant Swiss Parliament and disinterested Swiss public have made it difficult for the GOS to provide more reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan. He said that he therefore expects the Swiss commitment to Afghan reconstruction to remain at USD 15 million per year. While Swiss annual contributions to Afghan reconstruction are not likely to increase in the foreseeable future, Combernois emphasized that the GOS was looking for ways to "consolidate" Swiss assistance, with a view to finding synergies with other partners, spending assistance funds more efficiently, and placing assistance on a more solid, longer-term basis. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Charge met April 16 with Ambassador Pierre Combernois, Chief of the MFA's Division for Asian and Pacific Affairs, to discuss Swiss plans for the upcoming International Support Conference on Afghanistan, to be hosted by France in Paris on June 12. Per reftel, Charge emphasized the importance of the conference and the hope that Switzerland will increase its assistance to Afghanistan, particularly in the wake of the Swiss MOD's decision to withdraw Swiss contributions to ISAF (Note: Switzerland had two staff officers at PRT-Kunduz until late February. End Note). Pierre-Yves Fux, MFA Senior Coordinator for South Asia joined Combernois in the meeting; poloff accompanied Charge.

Likely Head of Swiss Delegation

¶3. (C) Combernois said that no final decision had been made, but that he expects that MFA State Secretary Michael Ambuehl -- FM Calmy-Rey's deputy -- probably will head the Swiss delegation to the June 12 conference in Paris. This is because FM Calmy-Rey likely will need to be in Switzerland at that time to receive senior foreign dignitaries expected to attend the 2008 European soccer championship ("Euro 2008"),

which Switzerland is co-hosting with Austria in June.

Swiss Reviewing Assistance to Afghanistan

¶14. (C) Combernoous said that the International Support Conference on Afghanistan comes at a useful time for the GOS, which has been reviewing its assistance to Afghanistan. He commented that Afghanistan was "never a major partner of Switzerland," and, while there is "no lack of interest" in Afghanistan in the MFA, the Swiss Parliament remains reluctant to become more involved, and the Swiss public is relatively disinterested in Afghan issues. Combernoous noted that the Swiss MOD had withdrawn the Swiss contribution to ISAF in February, due to concerns about the implications of Swiss participation in ISAF for Swiss "neutrality" and related legal/constitutional restrictions. According to Combernoous, these factors have made it difficult for the MFA to do more in terms of reconstruction assistance. He said that he therefore expects the Swiss commitment to Afghan reconstruction to remain at USD 15 million per year.

¶15. (C) While Swiss annual contributions to Afghan reconstruction are not likely to increase in the foreseeable future, Combernoous emphasized that the GOS was looking for ways to "consolidate" Swiss assistance, with a view to finding synergies with other partners, spending assistance funds more efficiently, and placing assistance on a more solid, longer-term basis. He also mentioned that Swiss assistance to Pakistan was under review, and that there was a possibility that assistance to Afghanistan could be increased, if the GOS were to reduce its assistance to Pakistan. Charge stressed the importance of both Pakistan and Afghanistan to achieving our common goals.

¶16. (C) Combernoous outlined four "pillars" of ongoing and prospective Swiss assistance to Afghanistan: 1) projects of the Swiss Development Corporation (SDC -- roughly the Swiss equivalent of USAID) in the areas of rural economic development and governance; 2) Swiss projects in the area of "national heritage" preservation (Note: Combernoous said the GOS would like to do more in this area -- a "rampart against the Taliban" -- either alone or with the Germans, but was having trouble finding partners on the ground. End Note); 3) using the Swiss MOD-funded training centers in Geneva to train more Afghan security officials (Note: the centers include the Geneva Center for Security Policy, the Center for Democratic Control of Armed Forces, and the Humanitarian Demining Center. End Note); and 4) assistance to Afghan border management -- specifically in support of possible future OSCE projects. Charge reiterated the importance of increased political and economic support for Afghanistan, and urged the GOS to increase its engagement there.

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